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Review

Reviewed Work(s): La "Metaura" d'Aristotile: Volgarizzamento fiorentino anonimo del XIV secolo. by Aristotle and Rita Librandi

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Reviews

ARISTOTLE, *La "Metaura" d'Aristotile: Volgarizzamento fiorentino anonimo del XIV secolo*, ed. Rita Librandi. 2 vols. (Romanica Neapolitana, 29.) Naples: Liguori, 1995. Paper. 1: pp. 330. 2: pp. 276; 1 diagram. L 75,000.

Rita Librandi has a number of works to her credit dealing with the history of the Italian language, especially its regional dialects. Here she turns her attention to Italian scientific prose, with a critical edition of an anonymous mid-fourteenth-century Florentine vulgarization of what at its core is Aristotle's *Meteorologica*. The translation, which is substantially incomplete, was done primarily to act as a stock on which to graft Italian versions of the commentaries of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. Even then the translations are far from complete, and they are handled in a strange way. The Albertus commentary (forty-eight chapters) is favored over Thomas's (ten chapters), but Albert's work is ascribed to Thomas, no doubt with an eye to the taste of the day. As for the quality of the Florentine translation, an Anglophone can only accede to the judgment of the editor, which is that it disseminates without betraying the dignity of the Latin on which it was based. It certainly omits much, and on occasion slants Aristotle's meaning to bring it more in line with Albert's commentary; but we are not provided with a Latin Aristotle or a commentary, and it would require another two volumes at least to do full justice to this aspect of the work, so we must be grateful for Librandi's many insights on this score.

Librandi's edition is based on eight witnesses. (By comparison, there are at least fifty-two witnesses to Albert's commentary.) After her basic text in the first volume, the editor prints certain interpolations attributable to one of the "mercanti scrittori e viaggiatori" to whom the basic translation was addressed. The main text occupies 162 pages in all, the remainder of the two volumes comprising much excellent critical material. The method adopted lends itself very well to the odd textual mixture: the textual apparatus is completely separated from the text and is itself annotated, chiefly from the point of view of its linguistic interest. A more substantial section of the second volume deals with the witnesses and their classification, while later there is an invaluable glossary, which in the fullness of time should play its part in swelling the Italian dictionary. There are the seeds here of doctoral dissertations to come, perhaps on the distinction between *pianeta* and *pianeto*, or on the nexus between *velocemente* and *vehementer*, or on the subtle semantic divisions between *cerchio*, *sfera*, and *orbis*. The bibliography is good without being overburdened, and English material is well represented—although Paget Toynbee's 1899 work could well have been supplemented by Toynbee-Singleton, and why only volume 2 of Lynn Thorndike's *History of Magic and Experimental Science* is listed (it covers only the thirteenth century) is hard to understand.

The text is what matters most, but no cursory reading of it can give the insights vouchsafed to its editor, so that two of the introductory essays to the first volume will for many readers be the chief ports of call. The introduction places the work not so much in its scientific context as in the context of the translation culture of the high Middle Ages. There remains much that is unsaid about the science behind all this. It is of some interest, for instance, to observe a degree of interpolation of scientific material that is quite alien to Aristotle's original—for example, anachronistic astrological matter. This manifests itself even in such an innocent translation as that of "in libro de effectibus planetarum" into "nel libro delle Vitudi de le pianete"; but elsewhere there is full astrological allusion. Comparisons with Dante's scholastic excursions are unavoidable.

The third introductory essay (the second deals with interpolations in one of the manu-

scripts) is that nearest the editor's heart. It concerns the techniques of the translator and the "syntax of scientific communication." A sketch based on examples rather than a blow-by-blow account of the whole field, it is calculated to please the average student of Italian empirical linguistics. As for the title of the text, the secret behind the philology of "Metaura" must be preserved as carefully as the last page of a novel, in any fair review. Suffice it to say that the reader should be prepared to link it with "trans contemplatione."

All told, this is a most valuable edition, and my only complaints are minor. Its table of contents is often unequal to the task of leading the reader to the required place. The notes are not keyed by page numbers, and contrary to the exasperating Continental practice of multiplying indices *praeter necessitatem*, this volume has no real index at all, at least within the English meaning of the word. To have the text, however, is to forgive such minor failings. For those who want to know how Aristotle could be inconspicuously but shrewdly updated by a fourteenth-century Italian writer, through a blending with modern authorities, here is one answer.

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L'Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et culture. (Byzantina Sorbonensia, 12.) Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996. Paper. Pp. xiv, 242 plus 12 color figures and black-and-white figures and plans; 1 map. F 150.

Specialists in Byzantium and Armenia are well aware of the complex and rich history of the relations of those two politico-cultural entities, and thus the importance of the conference of specialists out of which this volume arose is self-evident. The review can do no more than present the results of each paper, as space permits no detailed discussion of the reviewer's comments. The contributions, each in its own way, offer us the "production of new knowledge," and as such they are most welcome to specialists dealing with an entire realm stretching from Byzantium to Iran. The result of these papers has been the break down of the broad monolithic interpretations of the relations between Byzantine and Armenian societies into more individualized, regionalized, and particularized analyses.

Since the number of essays is large (twenty-two), it is convenient to approach this comparative study under five broad categories: literature, social history, political and economic history, ecclesiastical history, and art.

The first of the essays on literature, that of S. S. Arevshatyan, presents us with an interesting hypothesis: the fifth-century Neoplatonic philosopher David the Armenian is most likely the author of substantial parts of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*: "On the Divine Names," "On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," and "The Letters." The second offering, by V. Arutjunova-Fidajan, is essentially a broad analysis of the "literary" image of the Byzantine Empire, of the emperors and their role in the divine historical scheme, and of Byzantino-Armenian political relations in the tenth–eleventh centuries. The image is one of a Byzantium that betrayed the Armenians, and the author concludes, "Elle a survécu pendant près de huit siècles dans l'historiographie arménienne et elle a permis de justifier et d'idéaliser la politique des seigneurs arméniens qui avaient quitté le sol ancestral pour s'établir dans l'empire au moment de l'invasion seldjuquide." M.-L. Chaumont examines the Armenian and Greek versions of Agathangelos on the purported visit of Tiridates III to Constantine I in the West and of a treaty between the two monarchs. The author rightly rejects the former as legend, possibly based on the actual flight of Tiridates II to Rome in 253. But there is a real possibility that there may have been a treaty between Constantine I and Tiridates III. Two critical studies are dedicated to the historical composition of the Armenian *Lewond*. In the first J.-P. Mahé argues, successfully, that the chronicler actually wrote in the eighth century, that the work was *ab initio* a universal chronicle, and that its document(s) has/have real